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### Neon is Trying to Tell You Something

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*University of Montana*

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NEON IS TRYING  
TO TELL YOU SOMETHING

by

GRACE ANN ARENAS

Bachelor of Arts, Washington College, Chestertown, MD, 2014

Professional Paper  
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts, Creative Writing

The University of Montana  
Missoula, MT

May 2017

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“Neon is Trying to Tell You Something” — Abstract

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The following is the manuscript of my poetry collection, “Neon is Trying to Tell You Something.” This manuscript represents my development of poetic voice and style over the course of the past two years. In these poems, images accrue and take on new meaning, while still retaining echoes of their original connotations. This is how the speaker’s mind makes sense of things: evolutionarily. As a collection, these poems do not attempt to world-build or use their foreign landscapes as the driving force of symbol, but rather they use these landscapes as the essential terminology for their logic puzzles, their syllogistic reasoning. The result is an experience of the mind parsing its anxieties, doubts, and joys in turn, all with equal, attentive curiosity.

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*I don't cry to take the moon home with me in my pocket nor do I fret to leave her behind me.*

— John Keats

*At Stage III the reduction in scope of WHITE and BLACK continues and a new category emerges. This may be either GREEN or YELLOW. GREEN normally includes English yellow-green, greens, blue-greens, blues, and blue-purples... At Stage V the focus of blue emerges from the GREEN area. GREEN now becomes green. At this stage, BLACK and WHITE are fully reduced to black and white, that is, to neutral values. The RED area is probably also reduced, losing purples and violets.*

### **Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution**

— Brent Berlin and Paul Kay

Green

## **This slow unfurling planet**

I feel the shift  
of every coiled quiver tentacle  
underfoot  
willing itself blossomward  
feel the rattling mucus breath  
and sliding over and between  
of rubbery arms  
feel the soft rhythm the coarse  
music of growth  
and requisite resistance  
there is a heartbeat beating and I feel it  
as though it is the off-on blink  
of some satellite turning  
my eyelids black then red  
I understand a tongue  
can't always taste like honey but  
record the fading anyway  
and the stretching petal desire is finite  
not in tensile strength but in fact  
of desire and I feel it  
the sighing clutching grasp  
everything it will be  
unformed and in slippery pacing back  
and forth ask for form  
or path or shape finite and final  
I spell it out  
in steps  
and feel a shudder of something  
cinched tight— trying

## **On wanting to break zoology**

From out of what mother-of-pearl placenta

this sense breached, a school of manta rays crying  
at their lack of gull-snout, wing-wind, wiry  
nesting tendencies

I will be your pocket alien, flannel wriggling,  
alarmed gills practicing sedation  
sedation practicing authentic breath  
whatever means authentic anyway, a convertible

waxed to chrome perfection, heirloom grapeseed

would I have to rein in my tentacles?

Twist of licorice, liquid nitrogen and its haze-fingers  
as if nothing is sufficient in grasp or grip  
all amputated, the cephalopods of notebook daydream,  
scrawled next to those transparent cubes

I drew dozens and the magazines said  
this alternative to looping daisies meant I adhered  
to order, structure, the way

Elmer's glue adheres, as a rule, to nothing but skin

but how, when you feel like nothing but skin,  
is one to undress syllogistically?



## There's something or nothing in the air

It had to be tonight, or else  
the lake would raisin. Study  
the snowy moon. I don't  
believe we've met, although

you shouldn't believe  
everything you read.  
Fingerprints in tree sap,  
matching. Incandescent

moss. I tell you I'm held  
together by the will  
of a fern who likes something  
in my posture. Been watching

all this time. You say  
that sounds about right.  
And honestly, green  
is your color— but brittle.

I trust it. I hand over  
my fretful tolling sternum.  
The pitches we reach, erratic  
bliss. I'll fetch you

any number of pinecones  
or unspool at your feet.  
Satisfaction of twig  
and scrap. Convincing

flora. The birds all  
breathe— *however*.

**Without notice: green**

Neither lightbulb nor narcissist,

nothing name-tagged: Steve.  
These are all nouns— there

could be trouble. Adoring

a bubble capturing

light, gnats. The process

is more triple-berry jam, and  
you're short on sugar, and

lids don't match, and

there's sprouting. Tufting

and timid. Mid-air laughter.

Confusion and echo sticking  
to the grass. Do I even own feet?

I'm handstand-traipsing through

your closet. I'm slow-sweet

blending in a mortar.

I'm blinking. Small grit.  
You're many widespread waters.

And the atlas just melts,

falling asleep.

## Molting

I had been chewing my grapes all in secret  
when someone dropped me  
in your pocket prayerbook mouth.  
I'm not versed in these verses,  
their grist and tumble.  
Sanding eyesight.  
Someone should have thought this through,  
I've never been the kind of pinecone  
you can twirl in peanut butter and seed  
for the birds to battle over.  
This is a whole new coat  
of paint I've been inhaling. Hedge trimmer,  
rabbit scuffle, burrow:  
I didn't hear  
the prowling of it. Soil sturdier  
than my piano cover,  
and I've always wondered  
about piano covers —  
let dirt and dust gather, opt instead  
the bassoon. Harp.  
Someone thought about melody  
and discounted harmony and neglected  
a chorus of frogs flooding pond  
with arrhythmia. Spermy squirming  
tadpole, let me plead  
my case: my legs are too short  
to stalk water-ripple,  
yearning electric scales.  
Accumulate sun-curse blush,  
only. I may have run out of blood.  
Someone decided air was my color and breath  
would copper me for brief seconds.  
See me, penny-stitched.  
A shredded napkin for your thoughts.  
A taffy sigh you stretch  
for six full root beers.  
Its echo on a toothbrush. Someone  
versioned me a cloud with red cracking ribs  
at the mention. In someone: twelve oceans,  
an assortment of pickle jar lids. In someone:  
twelve oceans, the makings of gills.

## Desire in kingdom plantae

Unsure about life cycle: blossoms  
yellow and plucked promptly,  
video ribbon rewinding, a fabric

safe to bleach? Would like  
to believe it's a forest  
of coffee bean trees. Vascular mass

tended, thick raindrops. Red  
unexpected berries. Those practiced  
in small revenges are patient

with harvest. A pit, a seed,  
a stone— resting sideways  
on your palm: foreign kind

of peace in that patience. More  
than this scorching,  
the *you'll burn for it* heedless

of eyelashes. Would like to know  
the film will not corrode.  
Want waves of it, stirring leaves.

## Letter to a houseplant

I envy your bright  
sterility, green but unlikely  
to encounter any bee. Slumped  
and stroked, I wonder how  
I could become uncoveted aloe,  
a nectarless ficus tucked  
between air vent and lamp.  
I never wanted to overflow  
fields beyond eyesight—  
as much a matter of chance  
as choice. Reluctant wildflower.  
This lamplight and hardwood:  
only way to unlearn seeds.  
Tell me I should  
keep the sun off my back.

## **Reminder that this isn't me dissolving**

Phyllo and prosciutto slipped  
between books. Three

of clubs slid down storm drain.  
Oh, mathematical.

Who's ever tried sewing a tree  
back together?

Cripple needle, rusty pin. Lake  
in orange segment,

sweet acidic depths. Plunge.  
Even eraser crumbs.

Allowed to burn, watch embers  
kiss dust motes

mid-flight. Yes, fish is not scales,  
but scales scraps

of setting light flicker. Dark flash  
beetle wing. Bug, cloud

both remember rainfall through  
cotton-eyelet leaves.

**Can't I be changed, utterly, without being changed, utterly?**

Realistically, the plaque is painted.  
Or engraved, or whatever it is  
    we're doing with plaques nowadays.  
What I mean to say

is there's no knife sharpener.  
    Or however you get  
a hot air balloon down. You must  
have had a mosquito bite

    that never stopped itching.  
Getting taller by salt, thin grasses.  
I grew into this pocket and pick  
    at the stitching. But how it holds.

## Counting, dividing by twos

Ask the good china how  
it feels about steak knives.  
Birds who mate for life,

despite. What is this hot  
glue gun urging? I feel it  
in my pinky toes the way

I can still feel my pinky toes.  
Blessed banjo-haystack union.  
Green-skin, sparkle-sacrifice.

Only I'm allowed  
to say it, fine drizzle of doubt  
over popcorn. Slick fatty

heat on tongue.  
It's like why rain when  
there's chainmail rusting over?

Like why even  
winter-proof  
nice suede boots. Losing

mildew vinegar battle.  
The converse: exquisite  
peeling. Parting.

Keep plastic flatware  
under sink,  
for emergencies. Discard

the feather residue.  
Crisco sizzling skyward  
in a pan. With it:

this need. Until now.  
I am sure, though, I did not  
realize you necessary.



## **For FX's sake**

Remember how before CGI  
you'd actually have to go film in the Alps?  
The reason I ask is I might as well be  
soft-shoe-shuffling up the Matterhorn,  
yodeling for a fruit plate  
from craft services. In the thick of it.  
If I were a shellac-haired prince, I could  
go door-to-door finding a face that fit  
my face, a shining glass stunt double  
we could cast and recast in a mold, this time  
rubber. As it is, antsy for that avalanche,  
the approaching pine. Computerize  
my functionality, my reaction time  
on the slopes. Seamless, my powder-swishing  
hip sway. Why must you be so  
anti-crash pad, disdainful of green screen?  
The world's made progress enough to kiss  
sitting in separate dressing rooms. No risk  
of static pop from the cold. Among other things.

**If I said I wanted to startle you with honesty, would that startle you?**

Not everything can fascinate.  
Filled with the wrong kind of powder.  
Not everything survives  
like the whiplashed liquor bottle  
flung for show. I am here to announce  
I am here by way of excessive blinking.  
My throat had been a Doric column until  
the thing you carry with you came to hollow.  
Marble-munching termite, drill bit.  
I have held my melon-baller  
in a careless grip. In the face of dishwater.  
But then, some motivation that barreled  
in, glistening. Searing green and white.

## The replacement goldfish asks

Am I swimming with all the same verve

of my forebear? What uncertain times  
these are, pebbles painted blue. And everything  
circle: house and trajectory. I can't

distinguish myself in dim water, the chipping

away of my grand plastic  
castle. Drifting in flake, fragment memory.  
I am the ficus in the corner,

I am souvenir hermit crab and everything

craving to thrive. I am dust  
that was pollen grain and remembers  
nuzzling petal. And would

crawl back to blossom. Yes, and shatter shell.

With everything, I'll angle to the light  
and the light will hit and the promises  
I promise— to be radiant, to have you see— will be kept.

## Which ones are the better instincts?

To stay reckless as seaweed, feigning  
tooth or tentacle.

Often cough salt, though never  
tongue it like a cow.

Clinging, pointed—to grasp

is one of the first things learned,  
but thumbless  
for cycles. Like unsteady  
starfish, clumsy cartwheel.

I can only be like scraping barnacles, sticky remora.  
Coated, wool and breadcrumb. But then

there are eyelids like pink cowries.

Magnetic waves say yes, spinning  
the exact pebble.

Knocking the leg of the dock.  
A secret of pith under red nail.

I embed and raise hackle,

for the house may become  
more paint than house, in due time.

## Consume the fox mouth slowly

Is there such a thing  
as too much moonlight?

It's a process, I guess,  
like learning the quick step,  
sketching with non-dominant hand.

If I were a moth, I'd be quilting  
a new pattern for my wings.

Treebark thimble—  
name me one bite  
of silver among the ferns.

But fingers click against each other,  
tiny woodpeck rhythm.

Nothing to maneuver.  
The dark, slowest dissolving,  
catches of it left in acorn.

And there's a whetstone that keeps  
needlepricks of light sharp  
for long-dead stars,  
so I can't trust anything.

## Hydration is the least of it

Funnel cake and tunnel vision. You are carouseling  
around him every second  
and no wonder dizzy-down, drowning.

Enveloped, impeccable  
bubblegum. They'd call it something  
like the vapors. Eyeroll. But isn't everything

fogging gray-white? There's not a lick

of justice to it: this satin hibiscus,  
this wobbly tripod, this trademark. Don't count  
your tickets before they're

hole-punched. Slogging through mud,  
cartwheel. The iron in your blood,

there's no forging it, but salt could be  
practical. Dredge it from his neck  
after a morning run. Preservation

and popcorn. Melting, crunching, molding, twist.

It's like neon is trying  
to tell you something. It's like you are trying  
to tell you something, all thousands.

## In anticipation of a precise minute

Driven by the *yes*  
that this will all, one day,  
unstarch. Meanwhile, it's gumdrop  
after gumdrop;  
passing dachshunds lick  
my blistered heels. White  
is not a color  
of patience; I have learned  
nothing. Squealing  
bones, robotic jumprope bound  
for knots. My sandpaper fist—  
why never coiled  
silk slipping  
through itself, fingers.

Vaseline on  
tangled links. I'm  
spitting out panic  
in sharp ice. Enough  
to slice the flannel through,  
enough for piercing  
ears, enjoying it.

Prove some principle  
of oil, raincoat,  
hydroplaning, the vinyl  
after all— but still  
hold me.

## What does it mean to romanticize?

Once again, unwinding

what's caught  
between boar bristle. A toothpick

dipped in gold paint,

fleck like mouse tears. I'm attending

to gaps in teeth and knowledge. Singing,

potentially. Have to be  
coaxed in the sweet way

of coaxing: stick of butter held

in prayer hands. Know

that this isn't the same as picking

through recyclables.  
Nothing malicious as glass. Instead:

cold button.

Attentive residue. I'm undecided

as to the shape and size

of storage containers. Crave  
a lake of it all, gnaw out my shoreline.



## Portrait in journalism and wool

- Q: And where are all the rabbits in your world?
- A: Knife open a letter to cure joint aches,  
plant patches of sweet mint  
below your window.
- Q: Letter like rabbit like violet rubble—  
there are places in you  
where kettles recite the names of planets.
- A: Hum snippets celestial. The mint  
is for dreaming more dreamily.
- Q: Wonder aloud who your fingers are,  
whether you consider all ten male. Do they,  
for example, wear epaulets? Trip up spine:  
explain a comet, leopard seal,  
chair missing one or more legs.
- A: Leopard like letter like rabbit's foot.
- Q/A: Very much, confession.
- Q: Does this shoelace remind you  
of anything— or, not.
- Q: Would you let a lemon tree tendril inside you?
- A: She matters.
- Q: I will use the yarn to knit the alphabets  
that flood this canvas.

## What is a world without fur?

We'd never thought in terms  
of fathoms before, who's inching along  
the icy dark. Cold oil spill skin.  
Identify the clothespin predator by imprint  
of teeth left in ankle. If a wave wants,  
can it tumble and tumble the same handful  
of shells? Let's praise the vestigial  
hind limbs. Ode to blubber and baleen. Nothing  
snagging, loose squiggle of wool. Slide  
over, under, asleep in industrial fishing net.  
Love being the desire to go whale watching;  
such an exact ocean, its ratio of ghost  
to squid. Glossy lunar gravity, the low moon  
swerves. I could float like spray of salt  
in the distance— spark.

## **You'll have to live with that color, you know**

I was trying to decide whether you were a bookshelf or a coffee table. I was trying to determine how much I could trust you to hold the things I consider non-perusable, to relegate you to the living room. Didn't know you were made of oak, not cardboard. That you could withstand. But I was never one for testing compressive strength. I was trying to color coordinate and only make use of monochrome shades. Who could plan, prepare, find a place for so many varied blues? Sometimes you are every sky and speck of Blu-Tack staining a dorm room wall, every Robin's Egg and Russian Navy. Because I wanted whitewashed and blacked out, I thought to nix you altogether, another junk-store donation. I was trying for the minimalist approach, all clean lines, slick edges, sharp corners. You've been sanded down. Lacquered. Lacking an eye, I was trying my luck. I was trying to leave you warping on a curbside. Be this bedside table, pillow, a full-length mirror, in spite of it. Forgive me with feather down. Don't let me rust those screws and hinges. Not trendy nor timeless, not a must-have or a steal. Have stolen me.

## **Carbon has two main forms and honestly what are the odds**

I'm not sure we  
can rely on form anyway  
in a bathtub  
full of soap roses.  
Remind me,  
what's a spine again?  
The train car  
chain of it always  
clicking, winding.  
I'd rather not dissolve,  
not so far away  
from the dustpan and so  
surrounded  
by complete orbs  
of dirt. There's a method:  
be small, contain  
the vital. Just  
ask the forensic procedural.  
But I have twelve  
looms per metacarpal  
and a hankering  
for cake. A tangled  
kite string but never, not  
ever, a kite. Tying  
together like raw  
pork tenderloin. Tenuous  
from outward pressure  
of apple, pen caps.  
In my ear:  
cartoon sizzle of a fuse.

## Prologue with set examples

If I have learned anything about love  
it has been from your hors d'oeuvres-platter  
approach, your way of serving yourself  
in cubed and toothpicked bits  
with a breezy little laugh, *oh, this?*  
*this is all I had in the fridge.* No I know,  
we didn't meet at that kind of party,  
but maybe I wish that we had.  
Isn't that the only way to know each other  
intimately, seeing the exact shade  
we dye ourselves in contrast to the crowd?  
You, my sharp turquoise, neon  
and body-pocked from so many  
paring knives, always make yourself known.  
If I have learned anything about love  
it wasn't from that boy who was a man  
who was a boy, or from the faces  
and ceiling tiles hovering above a crib.  
Every pulled tendon, splintered  
bone you went ahead and walked on  
was a lesson. Remember that party?  
More organ meat on trays. It takes a toll.  
We're not girls people picture like girls,  
but we did stay up until dawn  
like you're meant to, and ordered pizza  
like you're meant to, watched meet-cutes  
on that 20-inch screen. That didn't teach me  
much either. How terrifying it is to live  
as an X-ray, how fearlessly you walk  
around that way, your skin like a cobweb.  
You'll never make a soldier, so utterly  
unarmored. If I have learned anything about  
love it's been by noticing your eyes  
have a habit of opening incredibly wide—  
shocked by my suggestion that you find some  
shield to keep your body apart from the air,  
from the maddeningly thin air.  
Why do you throw yourself so resolutely?  
What do I serve of myself?

## Prologue with endless nail-biting

The eggs you crack open are yolkless  
and I know, we've been here before.  
You will forget again until the craving  
for antlers chafes kidney and windmills  
crowd your living room. There will be  
a living room, and there will not be  
mud-black warren with its myriad exit  
strategies, no sharp-gliding figure skates.  
Ice clouds like blanched almonds.  
Submit nothing in writing, or else watch  
your feet morph into second editions.  
Crave again, thin lightbulb. You'll never  
stop sweeping hair off tile or losing hair.  
Nine out of ten agree that this life requires  
binoculars, telescopes, but no grappling hook.  
Exhale a bridge of cotton swabs. Onstage,  
it's a matter of Peachie Keane who flickers  
glitter guttural, yellow sloshing in shells.

## Prologue with apparently bone-deep anxieties

Tell me, as you scrawl with a Sharpie  
just left of my hip, will you be sure  
to mind your stitches? I would hate  
to be left leaking, a punctured tire,  
cracked mason jar of sea water.  
Would like to keep the majority  
of myself. I wonder even whether  
this suffocated ovary should have  
stayed in place; it may have held my  
conviction about the purpose of acorns  
or some other heart-deep thing.  
And now a biohazard. Strange how  
we can break down and shrivel in turn.  
How you harvested a walnut. You've  
cut so much now, told me later, woken,  
that I lost barely any blood at all.  
And I want all the blood I can get,  
so I thank you. I want the plasma  
that makes my eyes twitch, the platelets  
that make me laugh when he sneezes.  
Careful with those forceps, they're pressing  
on my pragmatism. This room has a name  
I am inherently suspicious of. Oh,  
to remain inherent. Thank you for your  
time, consideration of my abdomen,  
for my iodine-stained skin. My body,  
sliced and sewn. As far as I know, mine.

## Prologue with someone else

Even flowers— humble bluebell, ever-  
unrequited mums, tulip pleading *believe me*.  
I can hand you this pearlwort, here, will this do?  
I know my voice is dog-pitched higher  
than those you tend to listen to. I know  
you are a dog-person masquerading as a mother.  
I am a cat-person who should never nurture  
anything much larger than a paper cut.  
Newton would lose his mind over us,  
adore our equal and opposite torsos, how  
neither of us has anything to do with elasticity.  
There's just two kinds of electricity, which ought  
to tell you something. A lightning storm once  
frightened your niece, we wrapped her in quilts  
until her breaths could again be used  
to tell the time. That was a joint effort.  
I will cut you off before you finish the story.  
And say nothing. I think we must be train cars  
clasped and hurtling down a hill, there's enough  
momentum that the dragging doesn't feel  
so burdensome, though just you wait  
until we're back on level ground. Opened flat,  
we are a recto and verso, we cannot know  
what the other has to say without  
a craning of the neck. A tulip stem  
exerts itself to prop an overlarge yellow head.  
I couldn't find you growing in the field.  
Only dandelions, dissolving spore by spore,  
only earthworms and indentations.  
Perhaps you are not blossoming at all.



## The litmus turned out red

This meant I couldn't love you. Suffice to say  
    we all know the ending to Orient Express.  
    Reliable realization that I was an opal, now  
I am a dead opal, charred like barbecue coals—  
  
but only through a tear in the cloth  
    bisecting *now* and *then*. Curious kittens  
    make for these fluffy dissections.  
Portuguese explorers haven't given it a rest  
  
since 1418 and now contour every speck  
    of this bell pepper I'm eating. Not too spicy.  
    Prescience for this precious tongue. To adapt  
is an unsplit infinitive as well as stupid, I say  
  
while breaking in these boots. I'm sick  
    of losing Post-Its to the coffee-splatter library  
    carpet. Hint: they all did it. And now  
my feet are blistered. You are wriggling  
  
in the continental divide between my shoulders  
    and I can feel you wriggling. Got me chewing  
    on chalk, spitting cirrus clouds. Kids ask  
why the sky is blue on hotdog Wednesdays.  
  
I would like to shred my gym uniform, weave  
    strips through chain link fence. Would like  
    to water my turnips but can't until I admit  
every thing changed, and you changed everything.

Blue

## **Two thoughts containing all my truths today**

I am not oak or maple  
you are not maple or birch  
and we are never aspen  
ask again and I swear there will be  
an entirely new kind of answer.

I have in my small raised fist  
an acorn, a fable,  
a fountain, and your sweater  
as though a small raised fist  
were, in fact, not.

## **This unspiky thing**

High-sodium obsession,  
this licking sanding raw. Don't know

about you but I feel  
parched, immediate.

So very grit and sting. I can thread  
together molecules

to form. Edit erosion time-  
lapsed, zipping. I taste approximate

two flavors— the wonder  
of casual pain. Indulge, indulge,

inflict, it won't be other  
than rollerblade momentum. How red

this tongue— can handle  
my antiseptic. Attend, though puffy

speech. No offered lake,  
no sieving. What else is caught

and grasped in particle? Everything  
that can be small.

## Weak in the knees

Hollow bird-bones, please  
stop buckling—

I'm trying to teach  
my phone to stop capitalizing  
You.

Why do we only  
get death and taxes?

I'd take an inhale  
of your apple breath  
any day,

every day an encounter  
with your chained-up  
bicycle.

Maybe I'm too weak  
to face joy

in those exact, exacting  
measures.

A steel skeleton, a bird, a plane.  
I'm always  
getting sucked  
into your propeller.

## **Myself apart**

Where to start the search  
under all these blankets? In shadow,

not sharpness. My features, yours,  
watercolor of themselves.

Bled slowly down  
the page. Feeling framed,

plaqued. The necessary data etched  
onto gold. But no, no flash photography,

we only want the moment  
rendered once.

Or buy the postcard. Reproduced,  
how apropos. Up to me, we'd store,

stow away, a basement full  
of armless statues.

Collect reservedly these  
brushstrokes, these spatters.

Not a moment we can see as orange:  
segmented, separate mouthful measured

out for anyone who hungers.  
My hunger, alone. My apple,

my landscape. Your hunger, myself  
a part. Your blanket, your fresco.

Canvas won't tangle smoothly,  
or at all, unless forced. Unless cut

by glass—fog-sleek— and woven.  
Keep away from the open door.

Keep yourself and me, under.  
Blue, our hazy, only moment. I insist.

## A backwards and forwards forever

I want or wanted

your erstwhile sock drawer  
next August's sweat  
and baby teeth collection

I am wanting  
to take an ice cream spoon  
to your graduation day

stuff a sugar cone full of it  
devour in one gulp  
pair it with your salt-fried crow's feet

I will want to see you age  
cheat your chin up  
getting measured

take the measure of you  
I have wanted to know  
what you'll whistle when you're

fortysomething and could want  
a mug you drank from  
to crack against my tile floor

I'd want your last breath or two  
to cycle seamlessly  
into your first and I would

have wanted your first and last  
any or every would have wanted  
have wanted  
want.

## **Absolutely everything since 1981**

Harry Hamlin, does that glass eye come  
with a lifetime guarantee? If so, toss it over,  
  
it's dark in here. Each morning begins  
the same way: kale smoothie  
  
with peaches, fortified with a snip  
of Cassandra-hair. A balanced breakfast,  
  
a broken window. It's dark in here. Let's plan  
on it staying dark, let's plan on  
  
a summer trip, somewhere Mercury advises.  
Sunshine expert. Maps these days  
  
are so damn detailed, I can count  
your eyelid freckles from here, see a cricket  
  
the dog is trying to eat, soggy tongue  
of Fate. Do you ever think  
  
about how one moldy day, you ceased to be  
an oak tree because of city ordinance?  
  
Measurements come after  
eye chart, that blurry block of gray.  
  
From there what can you see  
but the cereal boxes on middle shelves,  
  
the creases in your own palm?  
If I knew then what I feel now  
  
I'd have gone ahead and smashed more  
glass, shredded more pillows.  
  
Feathers flying— from such heights, you must  
see the outline of everything.



## Contortions of blacksmithing

I've compared it to sleeping on Neptune,  
but think now, the method. Nothing of ice,

adaptation. Slow descent toward snow-lined  
dreaming. There is so much to force.

Sledgehammer, anvil, whoever is which,  
whoever wants to go first. Dimpled, pitted

sheets: intention, the anti-hailstone. The future—  
hypothesis— is finely wrought

and filigree, a fence that swings shut  
with no creaking. My unease at the thought

of engraving blurred by heat. Follow evolution  
of scrap metal, how many hands

it passes through. Will I always be scratching  
at fingerprint, tarnish? I will always be

scratching at fingerprint, tarnish, perceived  
dent and discoloration. Incomplete project, us.

## Who has a good mantra I could borrow?

Tackle box brain, lures  
always snagging on finless fish.  
Collection of useless discovery:

chewy plastic worm. Butcher,  
butterfly open like whole ducks  
for stuffing and find coils

of hem tape, slippery camisoles,  
yearbook photos of every ex—  
caught them in metal talons, down

river drifting. Rummage through  
myself looking for a rubber band  
to snap against wrist— come now,

little magpie, you only need twigs.  
Not this nose ring, that muddy  
tube of melting lipstick. My rusty

kingdom for fishlike memory:  
a shimmer, a second, slick.  
And gone. Can't recall Tuesday

breakfasts, but her every glove-  
thread so clear carved in marble.

## Uprooting

To think how many hairs on my head won't be there  
come Monday. Farmhouse twistered, clump

of golf course dirt. I can feel hands, gloved, weeding  
the ragwort out of me. But watch it now, watch

for healthy shoots. How will you remember the pliant stalk  
of this body once it's tethered to a climbing post? So greedy

to sunbathe. How do those fingers sieve out pyrite? We are fields  
of wheat and chaff and crows nipping up the earthworms

in the soil, all crows, black feathers sleeked, braying towards  
the highway. Ponds swallow sunset, but we don't have the stomach

for so many burning colors. I don't know how long my grip  
will hold. It's a sliceable little body, this body, this cluster of trees.

Pluck a pear from the middle branch. No bruises to bite around.  
Sweated slick palm, I told you, I'm losing it. I told you to watch

how your garden grows, blossoms under and over and over again,  
petals sky-straining, roots gasping, stretching at the stem.

## Room of rind and pith,

room of discard, the nothing  
things,

half-chewed and spat.

Room of weeks-gone bread  
and rainfall, egg shell,

forsaken seedling.

Held in this heat, place  
my apple core at the altar.

Shrine to remnant.

Have never  
not been building it, devout  
in my way

to chicken bone  
and straw. To endings  
that had ripe, plump beginnings.

Know how they must  
have tasted. Memory of it,  
soft,

constant here. Room  
of echo. Half-moon honeydew.  
Sweet offering. I live here to learn  
what things

can grow from dead things.

What other things

might one day  
dissolve.

**Because there are thousands of ways to disappoint and before there were maybe seven**

We're getting late,                      these woods and I,  
and have only half-eaten maple helicopters left  
to offer in our dim              shadow              breathing—  
gnawed              in nerves,              can't fault  
the trees for standing              still.              Forgive my  
                         acidity, my lack              of bilingual.  
I can only speak my own muscular  
tongue.                      Apparently, it's a process.  
So many shades of vowels. But what about  
a snappier solution—  
                         e.g., what can I drink for              the skills  
                         to paint your face  
a meticulous              tiger replica? Fingers always  
                         blobbing overbright orange. Hope  
                         you get the hint—  
the hint is *stick with me?*  
                         — when I serve you Scotch tape  
as a side dish. I need              another napkin, eat it  
and the curtains as soon              as the door shuts.  
                         The nerves, once more.  
                         Twice or whatever. A process.  
This is a *me*                      problem as opposed  
to a *we*                      problem but paired things,  
like sets              of encyclopedias, are hard to dismantle.  
Would like to be encyclopedia,              your              set  
                         of encyclopedias, but              I'm a pamphlet  
                         on benefits of falconry and all  
you really want                      is an occasional steno pad.  
Or possibly—              haven't checked  
your Christmas list. You're busy              not wanting  
                         all that much while I feel              a nagging  
inevitable, like last-ditch newspaper birthday  
gift,                      can of paint gone sour,  
foil fingernail post-chocolate coin.              I'm  
afraid you'll start                      and end your days carding  
this wool, my              vibrating tangle. And I'm afraid.

## **I'm always weaving ways out**

My cold leg,                      your raincoat.  
My paring knife, your lemon.  
The problem                      is I think  
there is                      a problem, nesting doll  
without one      shell.      Where  
is all that music                      leaking from?  
I need                      plaster and you  
say cotton balls.                      Everything  
destined for junk                      drawer, but  
I feel                      warned by gesture.  
Unblinking. My                      recipe,  
your bookshelf. I don't                      mean it  
the way it sounds,                      and it sounds  
like skis on gravel. If nothing      else,  
understand. What does it take  
to stitch shut      doorways?  
A needle like                      a javelin.  
Your window,                      my ladder.  
I'll blink through                      the unknowing.

## **Recognize the temperature of skin**

Taxidermal rabbit,  
eternity of  
raised forepaw.  
Can you be sure  
you have  
a stomach  
if you don't  
sense the knot  
constricting?  
Understand,  
I am always  
counting  
by twos.  
Those silk  
untwitching ears.

## Satellite increasingly fed up with only its thoughts for music

Vacuum off      the coffee filters  
                 and I'll take up      millinery,  
sew myself      a stylish little hat—

Understand, this head is  
black hole, appetite.  
Every speck                      of space junk

floating by. I am skull-stuffed  
   with chewing gum,  
skinny calves, hotel art,      broken

French press. Six thousand  
   charcoaled heartbeats,  
hyperbole      a mainstay

of galactic discussion.      But I'd  
   rather not talk about it,  
   not while this sludgy stew

is up there, brewing.      A flimsy  
   dam, these orbital cavities.  
   — Above all, I want it

functional.  
Gauze concurrent sieve  
   and bandage. I want

the sodden thing to slide,  
fall on a passing comet.  
Hurtle                      nothingwards.



## This may not count

I'm not angry enough anymore  
to write the poem I intended to write  
about wanting your regret.  
I was going to compare myself  
to a maple helicopter spiraling  
downwards in a downwards spiral  
and not paying attention to how  
or where I landed, something like that.  
That probably would have developed  
into similar imagery, insofar as  
it probably would have developed  
in imagery that also featured things  
hovering in the air, because that  
is what anger most feels like, tense  
hummingbird whirring, yet defying  
physics: static. I could have demanded  
*marionette for me*, using marionette  
as a verb and drawing attention both  
to that subversion of syntax as well as  
to my own controlling tendencies.  
This is how I write a poem: I pull  
black gunk from the drain, dunk it  
in neon glitter. It's a little upsetting  
to be so calm now, so closed  
and resolved, because I really wanted  
to write that poem about wanting  
your regret. It would have sparkled.  
Anger sparkles, crackles in fixed point  
of air. But then I remind myself how  
you are not a poem nor should this  
thing we're thinging serve as fodder  
for a poem, but how else would I know  
how anger sparkles or that I'm not  
even holding onto it anymore? Tell me?

## To hold on to this ink

Lousy with pinholes: this cupped palm,  
this storm door. I was telling the story  
before it happened. Drenched

in something like sour water.  
Hand against wall: was that you  
wringing washcloths, dreaming back at me?

I can't and I cannot and here, once more,  
a pencil to gnaw at. Or else  
plaster drying around the flimsier wrist.

Whatever things tell us  
the nature of other things. Cause  
of the soft-swelling dough. Something could

have happened any day of the week.  
A lawn daisy morphing  
into a clock. A lawn daisy always has been

this ticking clock. The gears and the morning  
and my graphite tongue.  
And by cupped palm, I mean:

something's resting. Telling me  
there are measures to be taken.  
This bending body: rain. But slight breezes.

And by storm door, I mean: the bright  
color of knowing. And by pinholes,  
I mean: one color that can't run.

## On picking a blackberry

What if no one ever told you it was  
and so you lived

never knowing but held on  
like stubborn spring snow

against which this cell  
this jewel this tiny planet

would stand in such stark contrast  
and perhaps you would wonder about its origin

more often than your own but  
it wouldn't matter

this token this egg this ancient spider eye  
might just reveal its truth at any moment and that

would be your world for the world  
is a perfect fit for the palm of your hand

if you know to pluck it  
from the bramble without

blood and what might be blood or juice or song  
glistening small against skin

know that even if you know  
or even if you never learn about

steps and stages unripe ripe and ripening  
they will happen anyway.

## Don't count on it

Submitting to math, I calculate  
the flattening of soda, rate  
of bubble-wither.  
Watch also the slow fade  
of pasta water removed  
from heat, headlights dissolving.  
You know what I'm going to say,  
that recording these things  
takes a needle to my  
balloon-sculpted brain, that I wince  
at the thunder  
of leaky faucets, that I  
am exhausted. Oh just admit  
you're exhausted, tally-mark for every  
dandelion spore's escape.  
There's only so much  
graphite in the world.  
And I mean, it's erasable.

## The spider is made of glass

But what does this have to do with fractures

of bluebird, I mean fractions  
of bluebird,                      I mean the way they brush

occasionally against car doors?

Or otherwise: pebble  
in my boot, rocket of breath  
escaping dream

in which you love sushi and darker hair.

Exact nature: on hold until  
further notice, we decide  
with our hands in our shoes,

and exact nature is subjective,  
depending on curve of beak.

You're not the one  
who needs to hear this.

Are these twelve different cornhusks  
you offer?

This head too cluttered  
to tell leg from pencil. Figurines  
for eventual attic.

You're not the one who needs  
to hear this.      The fly-rattled curtains, the scab.  
                         A bike brought inside from the rain.

Don't worry— just brushstroke  
the foxtail, faux rivers.  
A thumbtack could shatter this web.

## **Loosely translated: looking at you**

Pincushion moon, I fret unending your small  
unassailable wounds. How much iron inside  
you — has been, will be, current. Perpetual  
tattoo footprint: no wind, scurry of chipmunk.  
Why was I so late in arrival? Picture a plastic-  
wrapped glowing, salted surface, Tupperware  
moon. Picture an orbiting hand with a knife.  
I am gluing together these cottonball clouds,  
sticking to every table. Will command myself  
atmospheric: perspire, blink lightning. Stand.

## **Annex, overflowing**

Though we added to my small collection—  
mugs with broken handles, faux-suede sheaths  
for reading glasses— I wanted more.  
The furrows in a wheat field. Drained lakes.  
A crater on the surface of the moon.  
Has no one ever thought of this before?  
I was not made large or curved enough, not made  
of solid material— cupped hands let sand  
strain through them and are left empty. The whole  
of me, a porous pocket. This body, a sieve.  
What didn't I look at, seeking out a something  
to expand myself? I could not feel warmth  
heavy at the base of a valley the way I could  
when it rested on my skin. Could not store it  
in a vase. I wanted more but learned  
I had only a finite number of ways to hold you.

## The spiral staircase, the fox den meet

I've written     the book  
                 about fish     scales,

                         extolled guitar-pick  
iridescence.     Had enough

                 of the art     of star-drenching.  
Photo,   torn,     of a glittering

cactus;                   tile, torn,   mosaic  
                 chicken-feed     scattered.

I'm     awaiting           a dusty hand  
in the dark,     or else

                 mud-caked.     I'm this type  
of craver: socks, tree bark,     and skin.

                 What I mean to say     is I don't  
fall through     the air.     Anymore.

                 Convinced that this  
is the reason     watercolor runs

                 down     a page, stains  
thin curtains.     Now I'll be looking

                 through nothing: not  
glass.                   Not even glass.



## **I built the house made of maple trees**

Lashes blink against piano lid til walnut

clunks cathartic. Crocuses are cooked  
from dirt and I

also unfurl

by the toolshed. Antonyms keep  
jousting in colors of birthright,

always annuals raptured  
away while mums stay mud-sweet. Blister  
begins as swatting. I practice

collecting echo and oval and spill baskets full  
all over the golf course. Velocity

and long division.  
Who built the house made

of maple trees? Voices carry in the hall, wedged

into fists. I could have swallowed  
an atlas. Like lamb down python-throat,  
square bulging, paper edge rakes

esophagus. Could be filled  
with those winding red highways.

Certain stars unchart  
themselves, burn until wickless. But it's mouse

and mousetrap, happenstance.

Let drift, crinkle leaf. I came back,  
omniscient piano,

because the truth turned out

only true.